so while letting the grass die in the baking dry heat.

Mary Branham, 71, has switched from pots with nearly 200 red geraniums to all silk and plastic plants and flowers this year. ''It seemed irresponsible even when we can water once a week,'' she said. Ms. Branham's terra cotta pots now have blue hydrangeas, ornamental grasses, orange marigolds and pink and purple lilacs ''planted'' in the soil.

She said she now dusts her flowers twice a week.

[From the Albuquerque Journal, July 7, 2002]

IT'S LIKE THE SAHARA

(By Leslie Linthicum)

Life-draining drought drives ranchers on Navajo reservation to sell off gaunt livestock.

About 200 people filled the stands of the Naschitti Livestock Association arena on the eastern edge of the Navajo reservation last week, waiting for the start of what was being billed as a ''drought reduction'' cattle sale.

Livestock auctions usually take place on the reservation in September and October, when sheep and cattle are fat.

But this is a year when the reservation is baking in one of the worst droughts anyone can remember, and hundreds of cattle, horses and sheep have already died. This year, emergency sales have been cropping up almost every weekend.

In a place where harmony is prized and people live close to the land, hot afternoon winds carry fear and uneasiness as the landscape becomes ever drier and prayers for rainfall go unanswered. Stock ponds have gone dry, fish have died in evaporating lakes, and grass has disappeared. Sand blows across reservation roads, and the stiff bodies of dead cattle liter the land.

''It's bad, really bad,'' said John Blueeyes, director of the tribe's agriculture department. ''Mother Nature's not too nice to us lately.''

Sagebrush turns black.

Livestock are not the only victims of the lingering drought.

Last week an elk cow wandered into The Gap, a community on the edge of the Grand Canyon, desperate for water.

She jumped a fence and sought relief in a sewage lagoon, where she died and lay floating three days later.

Many Farms Lake on the Arizona side of the reservation usually spreads across about 1,500 acres, shimmering in the summer sun and inviting fishermen to try their luck catching bass and catfish.

With no water flowing in the creeks and washes that feed it, the lake has gone completely dry. It is now a 2½-square-mile, crackly graveyard for tens of thousands of fish.

At the base of Gray Mountain just east of the Grand Canyon, usually hardy sagebrush has turned black.

Elsewhere, sand blows across highways in a rippling reminder that rain is a distant memory. The last rain most people can remember was last October.

Last week on the two-lane highway that links Canyon de Chelly to Monument Valley a road that sees plenty of tourists' cars during the summer a front-end loader scooped buckets of sand into dump trucks bound for a construction site at a nearby community.

Chancellor Damon, a heavy equipment contractor from Window Rock, was doing the work under hire by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to keep the road safe from sand dunes that had been encroaching on the roadway since the spring.

''It's like the Sahara,'' Damon said. ''It's just been windy, hot and dry.''

Damon is a lifelong resident of the Navajo reservation and is accustomed to huge winter snows in the mountains that hug the New Mexico-Arizona border. Usually, a three-wheeler is needed to make it through the snow. This year, passenger cars had no trouble.

''Almost no snow. No rain whatsoever, It's bad,'' Damon said.

Hardship bargains

Elderly women in velveteen blouses, ranchers in Wranglers and toddlers in pint-sized straw hats helped to fill the stands during a 100-degree afternoon at the livestock auction while a handful of Anglo ranchers from out of state lined the top row.

The Navajos, out of water and feed, had come to sell.

The cattlemen, fortunate to have rain and pasture grass in Nebraska and Louisiana, were looking for some hardship bargains.

First, the invocation in Dine, the native language of the Navajo: ''Please give us rain. Please give us moisture. Let it be like it used to be grass green and high and rain every day.''

As the auction rolled on under a sizzling sun, stunted calves and skinny cows were paraded in and sold.

Some were to be fattened up in greener pastures; others were bound directly for the slaughterhouse. Prices were moderate and, considering that the cost of hay to continue feeding the cows hovers between $6 and $11 a bale on the reservation the auction satisfied both the buyers and the sellers.

The Becenti family from Naschitti had brought 30 calves and cows to the auction. Three weeks ago they sold another group of 30 cattle and sheep at an auction in Aztec.

Ilene Becenti is reducing her herds by about 50 percent, banking the money from the sales and hoping to buy more animals once rains come.

Like the rest of the animals on sale at Naschitti, Becenti's animals are healthy; they are just much lighter than they should be at this time, and it is costing more to feed them as hay prices rise.

''There's no grass. It's completely dry,'' said Patricia Arviso, Becenti's niece and one of the many family members who look after the animals.

''When I was growing up,'' Arviso said, ''it never looked like this.''

Becenti is not in the ranching business to make money, and she did not consider only economics when she made the decision to sell.

''There's no rain, no grass. We don't want these animals to suffer,'' she said.

She will not, under the advice of some of the tribe's range management specialists, sell all of her animals and wait out the duration of this drought with no livestock.

''It makes you feel good if you have livestock around your house. It's how we were raised,'' Becenti said. ''If you look outside your house and you don't see cows and sheep and goats and horses, it doesn't feel right. It's life to us.''

Too many animals.

About 700 cattle and horses were sold at Naschitti, less than one-fifth of what the tribe's range management specialists and tribal president had been hoping for.

''We want people to sell,'' said Blueeyes, of the tribe's agriculture department.

Rather than use hay to feed cows that are old, sick or not reproducing, the agriculture department wants owners to thin their herds dramatically, keeping only young and healthy animals.

The drought has brought into sharper focus an issue that has troubled natural resource managers for a century: The Navajo reservation, with so much land and so little vegetation, is being eaten away by too many animals.

The reservation is immense some 25,000 square miles spread over northwestern New Mexico, northeastern Arizona and southeastern Utah. Range surveys have found large portions where overgrazing and drought have combined to kill grass. Without grass anchoring the soil, it blows away.

As early as 1930, a federal survey described the Navajo range as ''deteriorating rather steadily and more rapidly each year.'' In 1933, tribal lawmakers approved a livestock reduction plan that, carried out over one traumatic decade, reduced the livestock on Navajo lands from 800,000 head to about 460,000.

Estimates of the number of sheep, cattle, goats and horses on the reservation today vary between 100,000 and 200,000.

They have symbolism that goes beyond their ability to provide meat and transportation. Sheep and goats are an integral part of family and ceremonial life; cattle are vital to the Indian cowboy tradition; and Navajo elders believe horses bring rain.

Last week Navajo President Kelsey Bagaye issued a statement to Navajos, imploring them to sell some of their animals.

''We need to help our Mother Earth recover so that it may yield and sustain green pastures again in the future when moisture comes to our land,'' Begaye said.

''Owning livestock,'' he said, ''is more a privilege and gift than a right.''

Grazing reforms have been suggested for years and never enacted. Blueeyes expects Navajos will haul water and buy hay for their animals and wait for rain to make things better, but will not be open to discussions of limiting their herds so the land can heal.

''It is the Navajo sacred cow,'' said Blueeyes. ''Nobody wants to talk about it.''

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2001

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Madam President, I rise today to speak about hate crimes legislation I introduced with Senator KENNEDY in March of last year. The Local Law Enforcement Act of 2001 would add new categories to current hate crimes legislation sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society.

I would like to describe a terrible crime that occurred September 19, 2000 in Cambridge, MA. A Muslim student, who was wearing a praying cap, was returning to his dorm from Islamic prayer when two white men with shaved heads attacked him. The men grabbed the student from behind and punched and kicked him. One of the perpetrators used a racial epithet during the beating. The victim required medical attention and received stitches for a wound to his head.

I believe that government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Act of 2001 is now a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.